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ROBERT SARGENT SHRIVER, JR.

April 23, 1973

Professor Joshua Lederberg
Director
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Dear Josh:

My wife, Eunice, showed me a copy of your letter of April 16. I think she will be responding to you as soon as she gets the chance. In the meanwhile, however, I thought I would inject my own two cents' worth.

Frankly, I don't think you and she have much of a difference of opinion. She is not opposed to the use of fetal tissues in a fashion similar to the current use of tissues from autopsies on adults or children, and she would not oppose, I believe, biopsies using fetal tissues assuming the fetus is dead. Her objections are focussed on the use of live fetuses for experimental purposes. Some experimentors are not only conducting live fetus experiments during the short time after an abortion when a fetus may still be alive naturally, but they are prolonging the life of the fetus for extended periods of hours and even days in order to facilitate more extended experimentation. Eunice is objecting to that type of "science".

Eunice is outraged that we know so little about the biology of the fetus and of pregnancy that some 800,000 fertilized eggs are lost every year in this country by natural failures during pregnancy. That is one of the reasons why the Kennedy Foundation created the Kennedy Institute on Human Reproduction at Georgetown University Medical School. That is also one of the reasons we have always been so pleased that the Kennedy Laboratories for Molecular Medicine under your direction have been focussed on "developmental medicine" for so many years. We have hoped that you, Eric Shooter, Guy McKhann and others would discover significant new knowledge in neurology and developmental medicine. We have always hoped that you would make this an arena of your own research.

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Like you, we don't regard bioethical questions as being simple and we share your belief that moral problems, if not dilemmas, "attend every course of action that might be advocated". That is why we incorporated Bioethics into the framework of research pursued at the Kennedy Institute at Georgetown. And because of your personal interest in these questions and your immense scientific knowledge and dedication, we were pleased you accepted appointment to the Board of Advisors to the Kennedy Institute at Georgetown. So, once again, I don't think you and Eunice have much difference of opinion on this question of experimentation on life fetuses. She thinks that's "human experimentation". Some people don't. Maybe you do. Maybe you don't. But from your letter it would appear that you do believe that fetal tissue is different from other tissues; otherwise you wouldn't be advocating only "cautious and compassionate use of fetal tissues." I don't think we have to be terribly cautious and compassionate in our use of other organs after they have been extracted from the human body.

I enclose a letter on this subject which Eunice wrote to the Washington Post a few days ago. Her manner of expression is considerably more passionate than mine would have been; but if you can pass over the rhetoric, I think you will find that she expresses some important ideas and also evidences sensitivity to the complicated questions and moral problems.

Just one final note: -- you will be pleased I hope to learn that the scientific as well as ethics faculty at The Kennedy Institute at Georgetown have been expanding almost like Xerox. I enclose on a separate sheet a current faculty summary which shows the scope of the ~~program~~ ^{Program and the} progress.

Sincerely,


Sargent Shriver